

# News Release

# Senator Pete V. Domenici

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MAY 30, 2000

## DOMENICI: NAVAJO NATION NEEDS FLEXIBILITY TO ATTRACT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Senator Cosponsors Bill to Remove Impediments to Business

WASHINGTON -- In an effort to remove barriers to business development on the nation's Indian lands, Senator Pete Domenici has cosponsored legislation to accelerate the long and arduous process for obtaining a business site lease on the Navajo Nation.

Domenici is a cosponsor of the **Navajo Nation Trust Land Leasing Act of 2000** (S.2665), introduced last Thursday by Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ). The bill would establish a streamlined process for the Navajo Nation to lease trust lands without having to obtain the approval of the Secretary of the Interior, except in the case of leases for exploration, development, or extraction of any mineral resources.

Currently, people seeking business leases on the Navajo Nation must wade through a dual approval process conducted by both the tribe and Bureau of Indian Affairs, with delays known to range from two to four or more years.

"The dual process exists as a direct result of the U. S. government's trust responsibility for Indian reservation lands. But in study after study for the past three decades, the tediously slow and cumbersome land leasing process on the Navajo Nation has been identified as a major obstacle to attracting new private business ventures," Domenici said.

"I believe this initiative will encourage the Navajo Nation to be more business friendly. I wholeheartedly support the concept of allowing the Navajo Nation to fully accept the responsibility for creating a single track land leasing system in place of the dual system now required," he said.

The Secretary of Interior would be required to approve the regulations adopted by the Navajo Nation to implement this new leasing authority. Once approved, the Navajo Nation would have regulatory authority to finalize land leases that do not exceed 75 years.

“I am confident that the Navajo Nation will work to reduce the time it now takes to issue a lease. Rather than getting caught in a blame game, a new lease applicant will be able to focus on a single process for obtaining a land lease, and the Navajo Nation will be the responsible party for delays. We must all work to encourage more private sector business activity on the largest Indian reservation in our country,” Domenici said.

“I commend Navajo President Kelsey Begaye for his interest in encouraging a better system for making land available for businesses and other purposes. Although other incentives like access to state and federal courts will still be needed, a faster land lease will go a long way to encourage more business activity,” Domenici said.

The Navajo Nation is the nation’s largest Indian reservation in both area and population. About 200,000 Navajos live on the reservation that straddles four states and is slightly larger than the entire state of West Virginia. The poverty rate is high, with unemployment hovering around 40 percent each year.